CHAPTER-III

- NECTAR IN A SIEVE
- A HANDFUL OF RICE
- A SILENCE OF DESIRE
- THE NOWHERE MAN
NECTAR IN A SIEVE

Nectar in a Sieve is a powerful depiction of man's victimisation by the socio-economic resultant industrialisation and the erosion of faith in the face of hunger, poverty and exploitation, partly man-made. The plight of the peasant in the changing scenario is brought out. It is a tale of "a South Indian - or Tamil where life has not apparently changed for years. Now industry and modern technolcal village in the shape of a tannery and sinister consequences issue. Markanda; fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of the peasant - "fear of the dark future, sharpness of hunger, fear of the blackness of night". The novel is "an epic of the Indian life at the edge of rural India", a full view of the village world where men and live, suffer and endure and emerge more human in their elements with their hopes and dreams. The stump withered all over but its root remained earth, Rukmani and Nathan are individuals in the symbol of teeming millions, archetypes of Adam and Eve". In the eyes of Margaret P.

passionate cry of protest against so-
portrayal of patience in the face of suf-
even where there is no hope."¹ It seeks
crushing impact of the natural, soc-
forces on the helpless lives of the rura-
Rukmani, the narrator - protagoni-
story of her life and struggles, i
beginning with the time of her marria-
tenant farmer. She is the fourth and
of a village headman. Her three s
married with dowries in the descending,
turn comes her parents have nothing lef
for you, my mother would say, taking my
my last born, my baby? Four dowries i
man to bear."² She leaves her father's j
under the protection of her poor hust
brings her to a mud-hut, which he has b
hands. She is shocked at seeing it,
This mud-hut, nothing but mud and that
My knees gave, first the cramped one, th
I sank down."³ Rukmani is very much love
She respects Nathan because "he was p
but in love and care for her."⁴ Rukmani

1. Kamala Markandaya (New Delhi, Publish-
2. Nectar in a Sieve, p.10
3. Ibid., p. 4
4. Ibid., p. 11
respectability in the fact that her husband is a tenant farmer, not a landless labourer, though probably he is worse off and subject to greater vicissitudes of nature and life than the labourer. She is at first of not much help to him, because she has not known the life of a farmer but soon she learns things and begins to take her life in the right earnest. Her neighbour, Kali, tells her that the house had been lovingly built by Nathan with his own hands when he was waiting for her. Markandaya expresses the joy of a wife who knows that she is loved by her husband:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye and your husband seen beauty in you which no one has seen before and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work.¹

Rukmani feels a wave of pride surge up in her heart. The transition from fear to pride itself is significant, for while the former arises as a physical reaction to discomfort and insecurity, the latter springs as a spiritual reaction to love and care. “Rukmani’s views are typical of a woman in her situation only to show the degree to which human beings are dwarfed by their socio-cultural ethos which is designed to make them tolerant,

¹ Nectar in a Sieve, p. 17
submissive and innocuous, easily satisfied with their lot, inclined to accept everything that comes their way with calm resignation."¹

The extent to which our women are held in subjection to obscurantist ideas and beliefs which severely restrict their range of vision and knowledge is obvious from their perverse opposition to education and learning. Rukmani has been fortunate enough to have been taught to read and write by her father, in spite of stiff opposition of her illiterate mother. Her literacy provides her solace in affliction, and a joy amid tranquility. Her friends react differently to Rukmani's literacy. Kali is "scornful of the strange symbols which had no meaning for her and dismisses it as a foible of pregnancy."²

Illiteracy and ignorance breed superstition and fear. Markandaya's women become the victims of blind beliefs due to illiteracy. It is a traditional world in which male-egotism is supreme as finds expression when Rukmani's first born child is a daughter: "What woman wants a girl for her first born?"³ Even Nathan, her husband, is a little bit disappointed for "he had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the sand not a puling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind."⁴ Due to the

1. B. S. Goyal, Culture and Commitment, p.99.
2. Nectar in a Sieve, p. 14
3. Ibid., p. 15
4. Idem.
compulsions of the dowry system nobody wants daughters to be born in the family. Rukmani is lucky in that her husband is a man of sturdy common sense who refuses to believe in the membo-jumbo of other villagers.

Rukmani and Nathan call their daughter Irawaddy, after one of the great rivers of Asia, which symbolically suggests that "for of all things water was most precious"1 to them. As Ira starts growing up, Rukmani's brows reveal shades of worry, for she develops fear that no more children might be born to her. Rukmani is taken to the temples for prayers by her superstitious mother imploring for help until they are giddy. "But the Gods have other things to do: they cannot attend to the pleas of every suppliant who dares to raise his cares to heaven."2 This is how the women rely on the "supernatural" powers and ignore the real solution to their problems which are accessible to them within the confines of this very world and which lie within the power of their own fellow beings.

Rukmani's mother dies after giving her a stone lingam to wear which will help her in having sons. But this was only a superstitious idea and does not help her in the long run. Rukmani is cured by Dr. Kenny in her village till her first son is born after seven years of

1. Ibid., p. 15
2. Ibid., p. 18
her first pregnancy. Rukmani keeps her treatment under Dr. Kenny's care a secret. This silence on her part, however, becomes a source of her exploitation through blackmail by the village beauty, Kunthi. Rukmani bears five sons to Nathan in as many years: Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam and much later another son, Kuti. Large families are also responsible for the poverty in India. With six children to feed, they cannot afford to eat well and a change comes in Rukmani's way of life. She knows that the frail economic structure of her sort of family cannot bear the weight of so many children. Rukmani has now changed but the change is gradual. Her father had been a headman once whose power gradually dwindled into pale significance on account of poverty:

The change that came blasting its way into their life came wrought in the form of tannery, the symbol of industrialisation in the form of flood and drought, Nature 'red in tooth and claw'. Hunger raises its head. Hunger appears like an octopus in the novel. It is the real evil, stronger than the original Satan that disturbed the bliss of the Eden garden.¹

The eventful, placid and traditionally tranquil life of these Indian women is suddenly disturbed with a violent jolt when a huge building for a tannery has begun to be constructed in the village. The trouble with Rukmani is that she does not realize that under the

¹ M. Prasad, Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya, p. 99
prevailing socio-economic system of her country, even the village does not belong to the villagers, but to those who own the land there. On the simple life of the villagers and peasants, Rukmani cannot accept them, for they represent a totally alien way of life: "They may live in our midst but I can never accept them for they lay their hands upon us and we are all turned from tilling to barter, and hoard our silver since we cannot spend it, and see our children go without the food that their children gorge, and it is only in the hope that one day things will be as they were that we have done these things."\(^1\) But Nathan advises her not to think so about the tannery. He says: "Foolish women... there is no going back. Bend like the grass that you do not break."\(^2\)

Rukmani finds that her companions Kali and Janaki, have reconciled themselves to the encroachment by the tannery and thrown "the past away with both hands that they might be readier to grasp the present."\(^3\) Rukmani does not compromise with the tannery because she clutches at the memory of the past with all her vehemence and regards it as a great treasure. She and the other village women are not only the victims of human cruelties but also of natural calamities. There are two natural happenings,

1. Ibid., p. 28
2. Idem
3. Ibid., p.29
excess of rains and the resultant drought, both are equally destructive conditions that ruin the crops and the village women financially and psychologically. Rukmani is blind to the possible role of human agencies in facing and eventually adding more to the threats and danger posed by Nature. "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid, but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat." 1

Ira is now fourteen and Rukmani manages to get a husband for her by paying a dowry of a hundred rupee. She is the second woman, next to her mother to lose her identity when she is abandoned by her husband for barrenness, and partly it is hunger and starvation in the family that drives her to sell her body to feed the underfed. That year is a year of excessive rainfall. It rains continuously for eight days:

"As night came on - the eighth night of the monsoon - the winds increased, whining and howling around our hut, as if seeking to pluck it from the earth. Indoors it was dark - the wick, burning in its shallow saucer of oil, threw only a dim wavering light - but outside the land glimmered, sometimes pale and sometimes vivid, in the flicker of lightning.

1. Ibid., p.39
Towards midnight the storm was at its worst. Lightning kept clawing at the sky almost continuously, thunder shook the earth. I shivered as I looked — for I could not sleep, and even a prayer came with difficulty.

"It cannot last," Nathan said. "The storm will abate by the morning."

Even as he spoke a streak of lightning threw itself down at the earth, there was a tremendous clap of thunder, and when I uncovered my shrinking eyes I saw that our coconut palm had been struck. That, too, the storm had claimed for its own."1

Due to the excessive rainfall Rukmani, all the members of her family, as also all the poor villagers, were starving as their crops had been destroyed. In the meantime, Ira’s husband brings her back to her parents house saying that she is barren. When Rukmani protests, he says,

"Mother-in-law," he said, "I intend no discourtesy, but this is no ordinary visit. You gave me your daughter in marriage. I have brought her back to you. She is a barren woman."

"You have not been married long." I said with dry lips. "She may be as I was, she may yet conceive."

"I have waited five years," he replied. "She has not borne in her first blooming, who can say she will conceive later? I need sons."2

The incident is a sad comment on what blurs a woman’s identity in patriarchy. It is not only socio-economic factors but man-made callousness and apathy that robs a woman of her femininity. Era has the flashes of illumination which is perhaps the intention of the author.

1. Ibid., p. 40
2. Ibid., p. 50
to reconcile with reality:

"Leave me alone, Mother. I have seen this coming for a long time. The reality is much easier to bear than the imaginings. At least now there is no more fear, no more necessity for lies and concealment."

"There should never have been," I said. "Are we not your parents? Did you think we would blame you for what is not your fault?"

"There are others," she replied. "Neighbours, women and I a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child."

All this I had gone through - the torment, the anxiety. Now the whole dreadful story was repeating itself, and it was my daughter this time.

"Hush," I said. "We are all in God's hands, and He is merciful."

That the life of an individual, particularly that of a woman, runs unpredictable grooves, becomes further evident when we witness the operation of almost a perverse irony in the life of Ira, the beautiful daughter of Rukmani. Rukmani herself has been lucky in that in spite of her plain looks and no dowry, she could get a very loving, understanding and sensible man as her husband. But Ira, with all her beauty and dowry, meets a curiously malignant fate. The sight of her mother's pregnancy in contrast to her own emptiness naturally fills Ira with a silent resentment and Rukmani with a hidden sense of guilt. But when the new child arrives, Ira seems to take a lot of interest in him. She takes up

1. Ibid., p. 50
the child as if it was her own. Her face becomes animated and the bloom of youth comes back to her: "Our daughter is herself again, 'said Nathan to me.' 'I have heard her caroling like a bird'. 'She is happy with the child, 'I replied'.”

Rukmani's sons, Arjun and Thambi, who join the tannery set up in their village to fulfil their requirements are dismissed from the job and go away to Ceylon and are heard of no more.

Then comes the drought because of which Rukmani has to suffer a great deal. All the crops are destroyed because of the drought. The villagers continuously wait for the rain to come. They continuously watch the sky, but it is "clear and beautiful, deadly beautiful, not one cloud mar its serenity." Rukmani has to sell her saris and other household stuff to pay for the dues of the master of the land. After a long wait the rains come but by that time the villagers are completely exhausted. "But in us there was nothing left - no joy, no call for joy. It has come too late.""3

Thus Markandaya's women have to face not only man's inhumanity to man but also the fury of the natural forces. The conditions of harrowing poverty, however,

1. Ibid., p. 87
2. Ibid., p. 72
3. Ibid., p. 80
persist, and the new child, named Kunti begins to grow weaker and weaker as he does not get enough milk or any other nourishment. Suddenly he begins to improve and Rukmani is filled with gratitude, "for it seems to her that the Gods were not remote, not unheedful, since they had heard his cries and stilled them as it were by a miracle."¹ But Rukmani soon finds out who this God is. This God is the Necessity to survive, which drives its victims to trade their flesh, their spirit and their inner sanctity to become receptacles of an over-spilling lust. And in this case, it is her own daughter who is forced to become a slut, to whom preservation of life is a matter of greater sanctity than the observance of a false morality. Nathan objects to Ira's nightly rounds when he learns about it.

"I will not have it said - I will not have you parading at night -"
"Tonight and tomorrow and every night, so long as there is need. I will not hunger any more."
"Like a harlot," he said. "A common strumpet."²

It is indeed a piquant situation where a helpless father cannot admit the implications of his inability to feed his children, and yet he expects them to die of hunger rather than lead what he thinks a shameful life. This is because he is unable to understand the subtle operations

¹. Ibid., p. 108
². Ibid., p. 99
of a perverse and exploited social system which so brutally damages a woman's virtue faster than it does of man.

Ira undergoes another ironic and cruel twist in her life when she gives birth to a child— a child that turns out to be an albino. She had to leave her husband's house for not being able to bear a child, and now that she is on her own, she becomes a mother. Rukmani reflects her peculiar thoughts about man-woman relationship. She wonders if a child conceived out of wedlock would be put to any biological aberrations.

A child conceived in an encounter fares no worse than a child born in wedlock... so Kenny had said, but could one be sure? A man takes his wife with passion, as is his nature, yet he is gentle with her: amid the fire of breast on breast and bared thigh on thigh he still can hold himself, and give as much as he takes, leaving the exultant flesh unbruised... But the man who finds a woman in the street... What cares such a man for the woman who is his for a brief moment? He has gained his relief, she her payment... What care of safeguard is there when the consequences of one's act are hidden from one's thankful eyes, and the woman is one of many, soft, desired, lost, forgotten?¹

Rukmani now understands the difference between the products of love and lust, of enduring passion and of fleeting encounter which are responsible for a freakish birth. She is of the view that for Ira's child to be

¹. Ibid., p. 116
albino nobody is to be blamed except "the wind and the rain and the sun and the earth, they can not refute it, they are the culprits." Ira takes to her son, Sacrabani, with a glowing happiness. But as he starts growing up, she encounters some more hurdles put up by the moral ideologues of the dominant class. One day the child asks Ira:

"Mother, what is a bastard?"
"Why do you ask?"
"I want to know."
"It is a child whose birth his mother did not wish for."
"Oh," he said, looking at her speculatively. "Did you wish me to be born?"
"Yes, of course, darling."

And the novelist's comment to dig at the reality is very sardonic and painful, "...and all the guilt of her efforts to have an abortion was in her voice."

The freakish birth and the wisdom ahead of its time which is betrayed in queries makes him less a human child and more a malignant deity that has descended on the family as a blight. After some days the boy shot another disturbing question.

"Mother, have I got a father?"
"Yes, dear, of course."
"Where is he?"
"Not here, my son; he is away."
"Why does he never come to see us?"
"He will when he can."

1. Ibid., p. 119
2. Ibid., p. 127
"But why not now?"
"Because he cannot. You will understand when you are older."
"How old?"
"I do not know myself. Now run away and play. You must not ask so many questions."
The first lie; many to follow. The distressing, inescapable need for lying."¹

After eviction when Rukmani goes to the city with Nathan in search of their son, Murugan and are told that he had left the city for the last two years, she is shocked to learn it:

Left... two years ago. Where could he go? Why go with no word to us? We stood mute and miserable. At last I felt I must know. "Has anything happened - I mean had he done some wrong - ?"

"No; nothing like that. He was a very good servant and he went after higher wages."²

In the city Rukmani and Nathan take the job of stone-breakers to earn their livelihood.³ They take shelter in a temple and are helped by a little boy Puli. "Each day Puli accompanied us to the quarry, usually remaining with us while we worked and always returning with us to the temple. Whatever we earned we entrusted to him, the theft of the money from my sari while I slept had undermined not only my confidence but Nathan's: besides, Puli was manifestly more capable of caring for it than we were."³ Rukmani and Nathan feel disillusioned

---
¹ Ibid., pp. 127-128
² Ibid., p. 156
³ Ibid., p. 176
with the city and think of returning to the village. But in the meantime Nathan dies of starvation and illness. But in the meantime Nathan dies of starvation and illness, Rukmani comes back with her adopted son Puli to the village to live with her son, Selvam and her daughter Ira:

So good to be home at last, at last. The cart jolted to a standstill. I looked about me at the lend and it was life to my starving spirit. I felt the earth beneath my feet and wept for happiness. The time of in between, already a memory, coiled away like a snake within its hole."

Rukmani and Nathan, like other villagers face the vagaries of the weather and the apathy of human beings with a spirit of acceptance. "The spirit of acceptance, born of simple faith does not break down even when the deities in whom Rukmani and Nathan repose their faith remain unmoved by their prayers." Just as Rukmani accepts the natural calamities, in the same way, she accepts the loss of her land and her hut. She has learnt to face the worst shocks in her life. Her view of suffering is Judaic that it is the suffering which matures the mind and purifies the soul but what is tragic is that even after having so much suffering in life, her attitude to the agencies of suffering is not changed and

1. Ibid., p. 189
2. Uma Parameshwaran, A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists, p. 94
she continues to hang on fatalism and superstition with little realisation that there is a difference between the self-inflicted suffering which can be moral hypocrisy and the sufferings heaped on man by anti-human forces. Rukmani says that even our priests also suffer to purify the soul. "Yet our priests fast, and inflict on themselves severe punishments and we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed."¹

Kunti is another woman to be dispossessed of her identity by exploitation and moral perversion. She is a foil to Rukmani, the protagonist. In a way she is contrasted rather implicitly with Ira as well. Markandaya has drawn her on the line to show how a woman, in a bid to give expression to her individuality, is drifted towards moral ruination, resulting in the crisis of her existence. Is she immoral by her own choice or she acts as votary of the novelist to explicate her view of the changing shades of femininity in the wake of the commercialisation of the culture? Of the two, she chooses evil, her ways of life are corrupt. Rukmani is well aware that she is a woman with fire and beauty in her and the skill to use them. Janaki is more outspoken: "She is a trollop, and is anxious only that there should

¹. Ibid., p. 131.
be a supply of men." However, it is because of famine and poverty that Kunti becomes a professional prostitute. She does not feel ashamed of her fall, she is unscrupulous enough to squeeze Rukmani of the paltry portion of rice to be able to eat to lure more men.

In Kunti's personality the novelist represents the human degradation but not that which hunger brings and which is allied to a sense of sacrifice. It is here that she is contrasted with Ira. Ira goes to the town to offer herself in order to be able to buy some food for her starving brother. She even cares for her albino child born out of her sacrifice. Opposed to it, Kunti is the purveyor of the forces of modernity and industrialisation. She is not only an immoral rural woman but a wicked character also. But she is drawn with a mixed light of indictment and sympathy in that the role of the forces responsible to pervert her outlook on life can not be undermined. What destroys Kunti's essentials of femininity - her own inadequacies of life or the social economic milieu corrupted by the evils associated with industrialisation of the rural culture? Kunti is abandoned by her husband and suffers from starvation. She does not want to go to her sons. This is in line with her vanity, false pride, arrogance and sense of superiority. Hunger drives her to unprecedented viles. Once she sees Rukmani talking with Kenny in an intimate
fashion. On this point she blackmails her for rice. This act shows her dehumanization and wickedness at its worst.

Kunti is highly fascinated by the new morality as introduced by the tannery, her two eldest sons are among the first to join work at the tannery.

"You see," said Kunthi. "The tannery is a boon to us. Have I not said so since it began? We are no longer a village either, but a growing town. Does it not do you good just to think of it?"1

Her skill in music turns out to be her hamartia, she puts on superior airs and looks upon her husband who lacks virility as a dull fellow. She thinks city life more charming than village life, she even snubs her village neighbours', "no wonder they call us senseless peasant women; but I am not and never will be. There is no earth in my breeding."2 In Kunti's portrayal has shown that modernity and industrialisation, however beneficial they are, pervert basic human values. They are a monstrous threat to a woman's identity in a system which grows on gender-discrimination and wherein the women are exploited on the plea that biologically they are weaker than their men-folk. What a lame excuse of wage-exploitation!

1. Ibid., p. 46
2. Idem
A HANDFUL OF RICE

The novel seeks to mirror the loss of a woman's identity in face of economic insecurity and the resultant moral problems of conscience. The fact is illustrated by Nalini's plight in her own home: her beatings, and the subsequent throw-out like a commodity article, no longer in use, and her return like a mute animal driven to it tether by fear. Unlike Rukmani, Nalini's problem is less of hunger and more of getting on with the eerie nature of the system that perverts man's vision: he dreams of becoming rich and in case of failure to cope with the socio-economic forces loses his humanity. His actions are never approved of by the author, yet they ruin the happiness of those around him, the women being the worst victims.

The old tailor, Apu has two daughters, Nalini and Thangam: the bright-eyed Nalini represents the lower-middle class wife and the novel deals with the shrinkage of her identity. The theme of hunger and its dehumanizing impact on man which has been dealt with in Nectar in a Sieve finds full expression in A Handful of Rice. The keyword 'rice' in the title symbolic of hunger, and the cries of the frenzied aggressive mob at the end "Rice today, rice today, rice" connect it with the theme of the earlier novel. Ravi Shanker, the protagonist and Rukmani are the victims of social injustice, hunger,
economic insecurity and thus their predicament influences those around them. Ravi's entry into the tailor's house is dramatic, he comes to the city to seek fortune and is ironically befriended with one, Damodar who introduces him to the exciting profits made in the underworld by dishonest means. One night, while escaping a police man in state of drunkenness, forces his way into the house of Apu, gets beatings and moral chastisement but stays as an apprentice to the old man because he has no sons. The regrets of Apu and his sighing over not having sons are characteristic of patriarchal conduct in which the instinct to have sons is deep-seated:

> What I need is a man, someone to carry on when I'm gone, someone who would learn from me in a spirit of humility as you might.

' I would.' said Ravi fervently. Apu did not hear him. He brooded and went on, bitterly: 'A man needs sons... I have none, only daughters.'

It is his honesty and dedication to work that win Apu's appreciation and love of Nalini which culminates in marriage. Nalini's predicament in marriage is indicated that the car brought to them where they were.

If only, Ravi thought passionately, it could have been different if only the car had not stopped but sped on, whisked them away and set them down at a strange front door that spelled out the beginning of a new life and opened into who knew what

1. A Handful of Rice, p. 39
exciting future! Instead here they were, back where they had been, nothing changed except perhaps for the worse, nothing to do but put as good a face as possible upon the anti-climax. Enveloped in a sense of incongruity, feeling awkward and slightly foolish, Ravi stepped over the threshold as he had done hundreds of times before."1

Nevertheless, their early married life, though hedged in by poverty, is pictured as an idyll when contrasted with their later life. Jayamma, Nalini's mother is fully cognisant of this important factor in her married life. "Jayamma had been young, Apu past his prime, when they married her to him. She did not love him then, she did not love him afterward, she did not even know that she didn't, because she did not know what it meant... It was not until much later, living in the same house as the bridge-groom picked for her daughter and seeing their sated sexual faces, that she realised her other loss. She was then in the prime of her life."2 Nalini is better of than the lot of her mother and of Thangam, married to a reckless irresponsible man, Puttanna. He is a good for nothing thieving loafer about the town the shadows of which injured Thangam's womanhood. "Thangam had nagged, cried, sullied and in the end put a bold cheerful face on it. What else she could do? But the hurt was plain to see."3 The Puttanna - Thangam story is another illustra-

1. Ibid., p. 62
2. Ibid., p.
3. Ibid., p.
Ravi's excessive enthusiasm and love of Nalini makes him conscious of what she is losing for want of proper comforts and care; he feels miserable to see her live a life of hunger and poverty. This brings frustration and a sense of deprivation and constant denial of happiness like a deficiency disease. Ravi is caught in a moral dilemma and thinks of going to Damodar as he has seen the nightmare of an honest life dwindle to nothingness. The novelist has shown the moral vacillation of one in grip of machiavellian greed. He feels drawn to the world of affluence as assured by Damodar.

"If you like decent money, you know where to come. Of course, you'll have to get rid of your beggar mentality first, otherwise you will never want decent money, will you?"¹

As a matter of truth, Ravi is a victim of the American dream of success, he wants to be rich through short cut methods with little realisation that it will land him into troubles. His anger at the wrong - directed value-system in an acquisitive society comes on the fore when he finds the difference between the price tagged on the straw hand-spun waist by the rich.

"Apu took it calmly. 'Of course they get twenty times what people like us get. That's because they're not people like us.'
'What sort are they then, devils? Gods?
'Different, that's all.'
'Then the sooner we become like them the better.'
'Just you try, my lad. Just try and see how far you get!'1

It is not the East-West dichotomy but the changes that has come over Ravi in Apu's home under the angelic influence of Nalini and the contrary view of attitude to the existing situation that from the start seem to isolate Ravi and Nalini. When Apu takes his bed back after ten days of their marriage, Ravi feels it hard to sleep on the floor, "he had grown accustomed to comfort, he could no longer accept the hard floor without rebellion. Soft living had become a norm...His heart was heavy when he saw his young wife lying down on the floor to sleep while other women, neither younger nor more beautiful than she, in those fine houses whose bedrooms he was invited so casually to enter, reclined on sumptuous beds with mattresses as plump and puffed-up as peacocks' breasts."2 How is it that a transient phase of marginal comfort perverts Ravi's attitude to suffering in life more than of Nalini's? Ravi does not feel himself saintly, being overwhelmed by avarice for gold and over-ambitiousness; his vision is fractured, he can not see things in right perspective that the lot of the poor in an exploitative system cannot be improved upon unless they reconcile with the ironies of existence and

1. Ibid., p. 69 2. Ibid., p. 65
rise above the petty vulgarities of life to be of themselves.

"You are getting high and mighty, putting yourself on a level with high-class folk. How can we ever be like them? Why can't you be content with what we have?"

'Because I want more,' he cried, his temper rising. 'I want a bed for one thing! I'm fed up sleeping on the floor. They all have beds, the people we slave for, do you know that? Day-beds, night-beds, double-beds, divans -'

'You've been corrupted,' she said. 'You go into all these big houses, see all these things, it gives you impossible ideas.'

'They're not impossible ideas.'

'They are. How can people like us ever be like them?'

'They're not made of different clay are they? There's nothing lays down they should always have the best and trample over us and do us down, and we should always come off worst?'

'They're a different class, that's all,' she said with a catch in her voice that should have warned him. 'Ordinary folk like us can never be like them.'

'Oh yes we can.'

'We can't.'"

However, life becomes an ordeal after Apu's death. Ravi shares the responsibility, no doubt, of the headship of the household but his grip on life, he feels, is loosening day by day. He keeps the Singer buzzing ferociously in an effort to work it out of his system, but he conceded, "defeat in the end". He fails to deliver the stitched clothes on time which multiplies his business troubles. The usual income is dwindling.

1. Ibid., p. 75
alarmingly, he incurs the wrath of the customers who calls him a 'rogue', having no skill even of a barber when the cut-out is not to their satisfaction and spoils the rich garments. The words of an Indian memsahib and his returning with no money bring the crushing realisation of the gap between the rich and the poor. The rich could afford to buy costly clothes, "and why not, since they had money and money was power. Money, he thought, with a craving that crawled like a disease in the bones and marrow of his body, if only, if only... and in his mind it took on the shape of a dark flame over which men crouched like opium-eaters to taste the savours of life." It is this growing economic inequality that destroys human values to the degrees that a woman's identity is totally eclipsed. It is the poverty and scarcity of means of living that creates tension and misalliance between Ravi and Nalini. The scoldings and humiliation heaped on Nalini have no moral justification, but a display of man's inhumanity to man, which threatens a woman's identity more than other social forces. Nalini keeps poise and has little intervention in handling business matters, which is rather irksome to Ravi. Hence instead of applause, her passivity she assumes in the interest of the home brings beatings, "he began to slap

1. Ibid., p. 186
The novelist through Raju's consciousness records inhuman and beastly behaviour which Ravi inflicts on his mother: "He loved his mother, he loved her almost unbearably now that he saw her so cruelly hurt and he clung to her, not allowing even Ravi's shadow to fall across his path."

The death of Raju for want of timely help and treatment is a moral violence, the doctor's comment on the sad lot of a large family has its own sanity but the way he takes the dying of a child simply because they are many is perverse: "That because you had two already and one on the way the loss was less. And going on: that because you had a dozen, and because you were poor, you could not care that much for one." In desperation, Ravi lashes out at the impersonal 'them', the invisible enemy. "I don't blame myself for not getting the doctor. I blame them. Them. Society. Guilty of casual murder."

Ravi loses sense what is moral or immoral. Instead of striking at the genesis of evil, he dramatically resolves to hasten to Damodar's world which is symbolic of his estrangement from his own self.

"No more blocks and restraints. No more loyalties and responsibilities for he had none. Neither to the land nor to people nor to their society nor to society's

1. Ibid., p. 187.
2. Ibid., pp. 187-88
3. Ibid., p. 231
4. Idem.
betraying ramshackle cod-
thing: to renew the oath
the lives of his childre
their rights; and this time

Consequently, Nalini is estranged:

fights losing battle for survival sim
vision is imperfect and he lacks courage
eexistence. Nalini does not feel fasci
dreaming of the success-myth. In li
between choices of life which are prett
has to grab or go under. Nalini takes t
she takes Thangam's stay with them
"stoically. She was used to obedience
in banging her head against a stone wall.

- Thangam affair is an additional fa
disintegrate the marital harmony. Since
of working hard to ease the stony depriv
steal away money from Apu's savings.
leave the house which, to 'Nalini's mor
human'. Thangam is thrown out which lea
tension between Nalini and Ravi - Rav
Thangam is one which generates waves
mistrust.

"You're always getting at
matter with you? She's e
and you grudge her even

1. Ibid., p. 231
2. Ibid., p. 121
'But it's our shelter, wounded. 'The only place up once and she'll make know what she is.'

'She's my sister,' offended. 'All this fun she's my sister. If it would you grudge her also '
'That's nothing to do Ravi. 'I just want some-w our own, without your fa - doesn't that make any you? It's our shelter, b '
'Well, what of it? ' belong to you, does it?' He seethed".¹

Nalini bears with him with calm resigna and partly for her socio-cultural traditional household. She sees the ' sister helplessly in that her lot is not

"Nalini never complained, fighting for breath, or oil into the livid stre abdomen, or arching her against the cold granit but he had never heard he Neither of the ills nor of him."¹

The incident of beating in advanced s causes profuse bleeding. It is fe miscarriage. Nalini is hospitalised an timely medical aid. The novelist inje that things are not what they appear to think of Ravi-Nalini alliance a happy better, especially Nalini who is mortall

1. Ibid., p. 100
2. Ibid., pp. 194-95
her own house. "She wanted to break the silence, pull down the bleak wall that had come between them, but she was too nervous, too unsure of herself and afraid of his reactions. She could not even speak to him of her fears for herself, of the abnormal behaviour her body had developed and which she desperately hoped would cure itself through the sheer fervency of her wishes."¹

Nalini gives birth to the twin girls and comes back to home from the hospital and takes up her usual household chores without fuss, though she feels tired and strained. Ravi hardly takes any note of her state of distress and discomfiture. His cynicism and apathy is reflected in his actions, idiom and behaviour.

"He seldom, now, proclaimed the inviolable rights of human beings as he had once done, nor spoke of the retribution they were entitled to exact if these were violated; he felt rather less passionate over them, and accepted passively much that he knew he should have forcibly rejected.

It diminished him. He knew that too but felt too beaten to reach for the justice and dignity that had once given him stature."²

Ravi turns blind to the dignity of his wife as a fellow being under such a cynical and perverse state of mind to the extent that the slavish suggestion and sardonic observation of Varma are weak to create a moral stir in

1. Ibid., p. 188
2. Ibid., p. 200
him and shatter the mask of inertia.

"You're losing your grip brother, you know that?"

'What in hell do you mean?' Ravi rounded on Varma. His reactions to family needling were still fairly healthy.

'Not so high-horse.' Varma elaborated. 'Fat's melting down, as they say. It's the rich fat globules in the body turns to pride in the head. The condition was well marked in you, brother.'

'And so it ought to be,' said Ravi, allowing his eyes to travel scornfully up and down Varma's flabby body, 'in anyone who calls himself a man.'

Nalini retreats into terrified silence - feeding the entire family on a straightened budget is a formidable task. In the words of the novelist it, "would mean asking him for extra money, and perhaps he would shout at her, she thought, take her by the shoulders and shake her while he shouted as he often did; and it made her feel afraid and a little sick. She frequently felt this way, and she wondered, a little bleakly, what it would be like to have no fears at all, like a memsahib say, who could not possibly have any fears about milk or money or the future, or the heavy hand of a moody husband."

In the existing situation can a woman seek fulfilment and autonomy? Ravi pounces on any opportunity that comes to him accidentally or he snatches by choice to humiliate Nalini or otherwise create crisis wherein

1. Ibid., p. 200
2. Ibid., p. 202
survival becomes a nightmare. The fan is one such illustration that brings her 'ouster' from her own house. Nalini uses a fashionable fan to ward off heat, Ravi develops a misunderstanding that perhaps it is the gift of one of her admirers. He wantonly accuses her of infidelity to find his maleness so badly hurt. In order to get at the reality he catches hold of Nalini's wrist so roughly that the glass-bangles break and the blood spurts and seeps between them. When she says it is Apu who gave her the fan, Ravi grows wild:

"You bitch," he said. He picked up the fan and crushed it; the fragile bamboo ribs splintered between his fingers, poking through the silk like thin white bones. He threw the broken mess down.

Nalini bent over it. She was crying, her tears fell on the pale silk. 'It was so pretty,' she said. 'No one gave it to me, I bought it. I don't know why, I knew it was wrong when money's so short. But it was so pretty. Why did you have to destroy it?"

The novelist tells that "somewhere in the ether, their voices reverberated

I can't go on. I can't
Get out. Get out"

How tragic that Nalini is forced to slip away in the darkness with her children to Thangam's house leaving Jayamma to Ravi's beastly appetite! However, in the long
struggle of existence Nalini's volition has been eroded completely. When Ravi goes to Thangam's house to take her back she rises at once obediently at the simple utterance 'come'. Ravi does not feel apologetic, nor does he show any remorse.
Markandya's third novel *A Silence of Desire* is an intricate attempt to suggest that the harmony in life lies not in the clash between the matter and the spirit, skepticism and modernity but in the synthesis. The clash and the pull of the two divergent forces destroys the significance of life, man and the woman are helplessly shut within their own selves for want of communication, involvement and the result is dissolution of the conjugal happiness. The novelist enters into realm of spiritual realities opposed to the material but there is no essential incompatibility between the two in case one has Camusian lucidity to look at reality. 'Quit India' movement has been followed by partition and independence, and ten years have elapsed since then. The scene is an obscure town, a white-washed house in the suburbs, and a village beyond the river reached by a ferry. Dandekar is a government servant, he is a skeptic and a rationalist, he tortures himself and nearly goes to pieces to see his wife Sarojini, visit a Swamy. She is ailing from a tumour and goes to the holy man to seek faith-cure sometimes at the white-washed house and sometimes in his village retreat. Dandekar is assailed by doubts: What sort of man is he, the Swamy - a saint or merely a charlatan? Is faith-healing possible?
The clash between the Renaissance world-outlook and that of medieval comes on the fore. Burning with suspicion Dandekar shadows Sarojini and finds that she has been visiting a Swami. He calls her a whore, but she only says that she goes to the Swami to be healed because she has a growth in her womb.

"If only you had told me,' he whispered. 'Why could you not tell me?'

'Because you would have stopped me going to be healed.'

'You don't know what you're saying.' He shook his head, trying to clear the mists that gathered. 'Stopped you being healed? I?'

'Yes, you. You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You wouldn't have let me be - no! You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don't go together, and without faith I shall not be healed. Do you understand that?'

He said, speaking with difficulty. 'Is he a - a faith healer?'

'Yes. You can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of God, if you understand what that means. But I do not expect you to understand - you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out. To you the tulasi is a plant that grows in earth like the rest - an ordinary common plant. And mine is a disease to be cured and so you would have sent me to hospital and I would have died there.'

Sarojini's visits to the Swamy's place leave Dandekar more confused and gingerly than ever. Dandekar's

1. A Silence of Desire, pp. 87-88
economic life which was smooth enough earlier is now disturbed when his wife starts visiting the Swamy. Apart from emotional disintegration of the family, the economic problems also become complicated. The husband and wife are alienated. On account of Sarojini’s neglect of the house and Dandekar’s preoccupation with his office work and later with prostitutes, the children are neglected and the household economy is in a shambles. When, after three months of the wayward life Dandekar desires to give some present to his daughters, he finds, he has no money. He reflects why it is so:

"Oversleeping from uneasy nights, three days out of six Dandekar found it imperative, to get to work in time, to travel by bus. There had been the docking of two days’ pay by Ghose, plus a ten-rupee fine. In that month he had left the rent unpaid, on which the formidable interest charged by his landlord was accumulating. There were the prostitutes, and, he now recalled, the spool of memory remorselessly unwinding, the money he had given in so cavalier a fashion to beggars, the boatman, the Swamy, to Cousin Rajam, the unnecessary purchase of an expensive umbrella - the list seemed endless."

Dandekar thinks of the silver-cup and the silver water-lily ash-tray that had been carefully kept in the trunk. He opens it, and unwinds the line wrapped round the two bundles. On unwrapping them he finds that in place of silver, there are pieces of stone, wrapped as if

1. Ibid., p. 144
it were gold:

"What are you doing?"

He turned, ashen-faced, and she was ashen too. He got to his feet and dusted himself, stepped carefully over the debris and sat down on the bed.

'I was looking for the Englishman's ash-tray,' he said simply. 'It's not there. Do you know where it is?'

She was still standing in the doorway, framed by it, rigid.

'Yes.' Her voice had no body, it was like dead leaves. 'Bhave given it away.'

The other silver?

'That too.'

He could only look at her, there was nothing to say. If she hadn't given away their silver he would have sold it... We are being driven, he thought; we are straddling a tiger that we cannot dismount.”

Later, he finds that his son Chandru Baba's thin gold chain had also gone to the Swamy. That is Sarojini's spiritual devotion has impoverished the household, economy, perhaps beyond repair. It is essentially a 'spiritual' crisis for Sarojini, the serene and traditional housewife of the newly-emergent middle class in the country. She is asked by her more modernistic husband to give up her faith in what she believes to be the traditional values of life. But after she all accepts, like Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve, the scientific spirit of the age which is not in conflict with the basic human values, as it merely attempts to

1. Ibid., pp. 148-149
make the human beings more happy here and now, Sarojini's fundamental spiritual urgency and her moral scrupulosity need not be either sacrificed or subordinated; but only her attitude to the scientific civilization needs reorientation. Her husband, Dandekar, cannot achieve this easily, or by himself. His friend's consideration and the official status of Chari and Ghosh help him in wriggling out of rather an embarrassing predicament.

Sarojini's belief in the Swamy's superhuman powers and spiritual superiority impels her to go to him for the cure of her physical ailment - a tumour in the womb. After much misunderstanding and an unhappy silence, Dandekar succeeds in his efforts to shift away the Swamy as the only possible solution to make his obdurate wife see reason and regain her health in a modern hospital. "Faith-healing' is neither the essential part of the national tradition, nor is it efficacious in all cases."

Sarojini's ignorance of the truth of the matter causes her much psychological tension and even domestic disharmony verging on the loss of her womanhood. Shorn of this flaw, Sarojini truly represents the traditional Indian wife, in her concern for the family as well as the religious devotion. The very first sentence of the novel illustrates the deep influence of traditional faith

1. M. Prasad, Perspectives on Kamala- Markandya, p. 8
"The six rooms that they rented were built round a courtyard... with an uneven cement floor in the middle of which stood the divine 'Tulasi' that his wife worshipped."¹

Dandekar's own ambiguous attitude to the Swamy creates confusion rather than clarity. When he is with the Swamy, he sees things differently from when he is by himself or with his friends or his boss, Chari. The pug-faced Dwarf at the Swamy's place is the only servant/disciple who acts as a sharp means of helping Dandekar in gaining one or two insights into the nature of reality. Sarojini and Dandekar's cousin, Rajam, also try to make him see; and Dandekar himself comes very nearly to the point of belief but soon falls back:

"Dandekar knew, now, what Sarojini had believed. When you were with the Swamy, actually there, nothing material, or physical, mattered. You saw things for the worthless trumperies that they were, rose above your body, knew for a while the meaning of peace. Then you came away and the pains crept back, the worry, the misery, the lust for gold chains and silver cups."²

The flow of economy, Dandekar ruminates, is a waste which will leave him poorer. The idea of dowry of the two daughters and anxiety of the unsettled son is nerve-wrecking. He is obsessed with the idea to get his wife

1. A Silence of Desire
2. Ibid., p. 159
disassociated from the holy man at any cost. "I must try again to get Sarojini away from him, because our worlds do not mix. It is disastrous to try and make them."

Sarojini is caught in a highly dilemmatic situation. She saw her mother die of the similar malady in the hospital but she, like anyone else, will not die and thus she goes to a faith-healer rather than to a hospital which is symbolic of the basic human urge of the life. There can be a logic in her move but there is no point, one can say, in her surrender to the influence of a Swamy to the exclusion of all other familial obligations. No Indian woman would neglect her family and the adolescent girls in this manner. The daughters are curious to know where their mother goes. She lies to them that as she had done to Dandekar before but the truth is out. Sarojini’s neglect of the children is self-centred, she consciously disrupts the family to get herself healed by faith. Children begin to move out and visit the milk-bar which brings them closer to a mixed company of the boys. As such, the two daughters are as free as their mother because it is not only Sarojini but Dandekar too remains out of home for long realising that it is the responsibility of the woman to look after the children. However, Dandekar’s patience is exhausted when one day

1. Ibid., p. 159.
he comes back earlier and finds his daughter sitting crouched beside Sarojini's bed in the darkness crying for mother.

"I want you mother." Her control gave way suddenly, she was gulping and gasping with the strength of her sobs.

'What is it, Rani pet?' he said, wrung. 'You don't often cry like this? What has happened?'

'Nothing. Nothing at all.'

He knelt beside her, meaning to draw her close, but again she shrank away. 'You mustn't come near. You mustn't.'

After the Swamy's departure from village Sarojini, already armed with the strength of faith, undergoes a successful operation and accepts resignedly her separation from the Swamy. But Dandekar is left with a corroding sense of guilt. And that makes Sarojini's plight rather precarious. Sarojini took the valuable things of the house as a gift to the Swamy which, when discovered, incurred the wrath of Dandekar. It is otherwise, symbolically, a dispossession of her own segment of self. The novelist gives a fine artistic twist to shatter Dandekar's self-proclaimed mask of duality. He has a final encounter with the Dwarf, and their pointed exchanges are significant:

"I said: what are you doing here?" The dwarf emerged from the darkness, squat, ugly, rolling a little on his bow legs...

'I - was passing.' He felt he was suffocating so tight was his breast. 'I

1. Ibid., pp. 165-66
had to come in.'

'Why?'

'To - to see if the Swamy was back.'

'He’s not back. He’ll never be back. You knew that before ever you set foot in this house.'

'No,' he stammered. 'I didn’t know - I wasn’t sure if I had been I wouldn’t have come.'

'Whom are you trying to deceive?' the dwarf spat deliberately, ridding his mouth of the taste of falsehood. 'You came because you couldn’t help yourself. Your guilt dragged you. You came because you had to come and see for yourself.'

'See what?' cried Dandekar. 'What is there to see?'

'The derelict.'

The Dwarf charges Dandekar with having been the cause of the Swamy’s departure and the consequent misery of the derelict lot left disconsolate behind; and Dandekar had done it all just for the sake of a handful of silver and gold. He throws away things his wife brought for the Swamy - the silver cups, and the ash-tray, the chain from his son’s neck. Dandekar, though shaken, has self-possession enough to answer:

"I wanted these things and I fought for them because they meant a great deal to me.’ he said steadily. 'That is a fragment of the truth. But I fought also for other things - my wife, myself, my children, and these are the other fragments, of which even you must be aware. You told me, once, why you came here: that your mind might not grow as warped as your body. Remember that, as I shall remember all my life those who are hero, derelict."
Though Dandekar wins his wife back which is symbolic of regaining his male-egotism. He has his household articles back which Sarojini offered to the Swamy as a token of her faith in the healing power of the spirit, yet his authoritarian attitude to Sarojini will not let her individuality grow harmoniously. The clash between the fragments of disparate 'truth' will continue to tease him out of thought as eternity does. The book intends to suggest that faith in Swamij or God is not the ultimate. Due to the change in time and the development of science, it is necessary to change one's attitude. One has to re-orchestrate her vision in accordance with the change as wrought by scientific outlook on life. The woman has to keep her mind open to the healthy impact of science on her sensibility instead of rooting her faith in superstitions and faith-healing power.
The Nowhere Man, as the title in the existential terms connotes, shows man's shrinkage to 'nowhereness' in an alien hostile milieu which directly influences the predicament of a woman's identity. The woman is as much effected as her man by the holocaust of colour discrimination and the dehumanizing racial prejudices which tear away man from man. The idea of fostering human values, universal brotherhood and a communitarian value structure is rendered utopian. In place of human sympathy, compassion warmth of love the forces of suspicion, hatred perversion and revenge have a free play to destroy life. Thus the novel is a very subtle interesting study in essential human loneliness and human relations in face of the dire forces of history and the resultant evils of racialism, colonialism which are a serious threat to humanity at large.

The setting is symbolic like a German expressionistic drama: the leprosy disease and the non-native milieu are symbols to show the 'nowhereness' of the protagonist. The action moves freely backward and forward to unfold the tale of the protagonist's tragic plight and agony in alien territories. The novel begins with the 70 years old Srinivas's visit to Dr. Radcliffe's clinic since he suffers from a disease which the doctor says, man develops in tropical regions. He
refers the case for further investigation to the 'Hospital for tropical disease'. And soon we learn of the circumstances, the turbulent political condition in India, which forced Sriniwas, a South Indian Brahmin to go to England as his father Narayan advised him to leave India because there was no scope for his future: "You will be black-listed in every school and college throughout the country. Government service is out too."¹

What a predicament that an Indian has no future in India and would have one elsewhere! If the rulers are bad here beyond the seas, will they be good there in their own country? Sriniwas's non-existent identity as a human being is presaged in Nirmala's consciousness:

"All my life," she said, "we have lived under foreign rule. At least half that time we have opposed it, but we have lived with it. Why has it suddenly become unbearable?"

"Suddenly, there is no suddenly," said Narayan. "It has been happening slowly."

"Under them there is no future for me," said Srinivas doggedly. He had said the same thing several times already.

"If they are bad to you here, what makes you think they will be good to you there?"

"If they are bad to us here it is because they have bad consciences about us," said Narayan.

"The same thing may happen there," said Nirmala. "Who is to say? Can guarantees be given? If it does happen there will not even be the strength we have had from our family."²

---

2. Ibid., p.156
It is told that Srinivas's grandfather too suffered indignities when the British Govt. destroyed his teakwood forest to construct a road through the area, the destruction and the loss and bitterness was the cause of his death. His father Narayan teaches in a Government college and is denied promotions, being 'an Indian'. It is the time when in the wake of freedom struggle movement the whole country is seething with anti-British sentiments. Narayan is well aware of the consequences of being so much nationalistic under the alien rule. His Khadi-dress in place of Alpaca coat is a symbolic gesture of protest. The whole family is involved in the freedom struggle movement under the influence of a neighbouring family whose daughter, Vasantha, is betrothed to Srinivas.

The Governor is to visit the college, Narayan is to sing the Indian National Anthem. He is sent to a lunatic hospital (with all his sanity) for his getting nervous and babbling while trying to sing the song. Srinivas's pride is wounded to see the Governor's hand fall on Narayan's shoulder asking him to stop making those distressing sounds. Srinivas insults the Governor saying "Your Excellency, take your bloody hands off my father".1

And then the action moves back to the past to tell about the predicament of Vasantha's family which physically influences Srinivas's attitude to the English

1. Ibid., p. 153
community. Vasantha’s family is the family of lawyers who resign from the Government post as a protest, the women in the wake of Gandhi’s call to boycott the British goods, burn all British-manufactured articles. Vasantha’s brother Vasudev is a revolutionary, he is imprisoned for organizing a protest of fellow-students against the British Government. Srinivas passes the intermediate examination with distinction in every subject and the occasion is jointly celebrated by both the families. Vasantha sees the exploitation of the natives by the Britishers and thus her reaction towards the first prize given by the British makes Srinivas feel restless. All big posts are occupied by the white man, with lower qualifications. Even in Narayan’s college, the Vice-Principal is only a B.A. and he has to work under him. Vasantha’s family moves to live with them. This close association with Vasantha’s family and other events in the country make Narayan as well as his wife, Nirmala restless. Srinivas is indulged in subversive activities and evades questions shot to him to elicit truth. But it is Vasantha who has the power to get straight answers from him.

The most shocking incident which shapes Srinivas’s sensibility and attitude is the death of Vasudev and police raid on their house during which Vasantha is insulted, which left a scar on his mind. Nobody knows
how Vasudev died and why the police came. "In death, as
in life Vasudev revealed nothing, but created an
undulating area of uneasiness."1 But his death serves to
he is
form the man, Srinivas as in his old age.

In England Srinivas faces the same hatred towards the Indians. The Englishmen do not trust Indian's intelligence, they think that the Indians are eligible only for inferior posts. Since Srinivas is a non-graduate, he cannot find any job to his satisfaction and takes up the spice business which flourishes well. On his wife's insistence to have a house of their own, they buy a flat, No. 5 Ashcroft Avenue which gives Vasantha a sense of pride and satisfaction. Vasantha said with pride:

"At last we have achieved something. A place of our own, where we can live according to our lights although in alien surroundings: and our children after us, and after them theirs."2

But Vasantha is blind to its ironic implication that to identify their predicament with a house owned in alien world is mere illusion.

"Chains, said Srinivas, glum amid the tea chests and buckled fiber suitcases. We have chained ourselves to four walls and a roof.

But these restraints were as nothing, compared to those twisted if invisible shackles that were later to be forged."3

1. Ibid., p.140
2. Ibid., p. 21
3. Idem.
Their alienation and separateness is underlined partly through the religious differences and partly by Srinivas's own doubts about his assimilation as his words to Vasantha show, "can you really imagine I am a Londoner"\(^{1}\). One can overcome the outward trappings but something which is archetypal is hard to reconcile:

"Vasantha was a Hindu, born and bred in a subtle religion whose concepts, being on the cosmic scale, made no concessions to puny mankind: a religion that postulated one God, infinite, resplendent, with a thousand different aspects but One: God the creator, preserver, destroyer, union with whom was the supreme purpose and bliss. She found herself accosted by practitioners of a religion that appeared, by contrast, to be positively parochial, riddled with good deeds and childish miracles."\(^{2}\)

And thus the inherent dualism forming the bedrock of Hinduism is for a great deal responsible for shaping one's philosophy of life. It's contrariness and opposing attitude of violence and non-violence, materialism and spiritualism, acquisition and renunciation, its philosophy of action and inaction, involvement and detachment existing side by side do not give a clear decisive opinion on moral issues. What has hardened it into an inability to grow and cope with the new ideas is its tendency to remain unaffected by the tidal waves of religious reforms. What is needed is that traditional

1. Ibid., p. 18
2. Idem
and religious orthodoxy can co-exist with the liberal and the pragmatic attitude so that it does not become hurdles in the attainment of moral truths of life. Vasantha has discarded certain messy Indian ways "but remained Indian in matters of religion as well as in dress." Her religious views are in clash with that of Srinivas rooted in Christian pragmatism showing its faith in the value of the present, whereas she believes in the pantheistic concept of Hinduism looking beyond the present. This diversity of religio-cultural construct has raised barriers separating the two to the point that sometimes they look like strangers.

Vasantha is a victim of the conflict born of dualism of the generation gap: the parents' sympathies are with the country of their birth but the children identify with the one which is adopted. The gloomy mournful shadows of the 'nowhere man' influence the woman's predicament in the home. The theme is highly tragic: the wounded image of human identity crushed by the forces of racialism and war. The two sons, Laxman and Seshu take part in war against the will of the mother. Laxman is an excellent engineer with REME, Seshu is a navigator with the Royal Air Force but he is dismissed for his sentimentality which makes Vasantha feel happy to see, "an end to her son's complicity in murder."1 Later Seshu dies in

1. Ibid., p. 27
operation by a German shell as an ambulance driver while evacuating the wounded soldiers from the field. Laxman marries an English girl, Pat who works in a munitions factory in Plymouth without the consent of his parents. Vasantha wanted to have a prior 'say' which would not have selected that. The pleasure of choosing the bride for her living son is denied:

"Only to have been able to select," replied Vasantha, and leaned against the bolster he had provided, "since I would have selected the best."

"As this girl may be," Srinivas ventured to say. But he knew that it would not do, since what was upset was not concerned with Pat, but with certain maternal rights which Vasantha had believed were hers."¹

To Vasantha's shock, it was a two-line information. Laxman is ashamed of his Indian parentage and thus does not invite them to his place, nor does he feel comfortable with them. It is this socio-cultural disparateness that creates a chasm in relations. Laxman's confession to Pat -"I find them impossible, To talk to" - disheartens the parents. Srinivas feels less hurt by this singular behaviour of Laxman but Vasantha, being sensitive, finds hard to bear the separation of her two sons - one dead and the other casting them aside as if they were untouchable. Seshu the younger son, was "the apple of his mother's eye."²

1. Ibid., p. 28
2. Ibid., p. 37
What Vasantha could do when her own sons disowned the relationship in a non-native place wherein is locked sympathy, fellow-feelings and inter-dependence in time of need? And the 'nowhereness' of Srinivas in a sense, has made Vasantha a 'nowhere woman'. There is hardly any hint of her growing intimacy with a person outside the four walls of her house. Her plight grows rather more tragic when she is asked to stay away from visiting her son when a baby is born. The grandmother's long-cherished dream of seeing a son who would continue the line in patriarchy remains unrealised. If they had been at home perhaps things would have been otherwise.

Laxman informs them that they are not to visit them because there is no room for them to house, the parents of his wife, Pat are already with them, "to tide Pat over - there had been complication after the birth and there was only the one spare bedroom". Vasantha is shocked to get this information, she says to Srinivas,

"What does that matter?" asked Vasantha, bewildered. "Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere. In a corridor, or the kitchen. Just to see the baby."

"They don't do things like that in this country," said Srinivas.

"A dozen people, sleeping in one basement, during the war," she reminded him.

"The war is over," he said."1

1. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
Later, it is on her plea that an invitation from Laxman and Pat is extended to them after six months in summer but destiny had something else in store. Vasantha develops tuberculosis and even misses the opportunity to see her grand child. It is not that she is not blind to the loss of her essentials of femininity but it is her helplessness to set things right in a world in which the 'I-Thou' relationship is degenerated into 'I-It' relationship. Her desire to return to her native land is not the expression of a simple immigrant to come back to his people but the painful yearnings of unwanted and unaccommodated woman to seek fulfilment: "When I am better," she said to her husband," we must return to our country. There is no reason, now that India is free, why we should not. Nor," she said painfully, "is there anything, really, to keep us here any more."¹

Vasantha dies in an alien land with no grievances against Srinivas who himself, in state of dangling, has lost emotional stability and suffers much in wake of the anti-black movement. Fred Fletcher resorts to humiliate him and plans to burn the flat intending to kill the Indian merchant. But it is sheer irony that Srinivas is saved by Laxman's appearance in time but Fred, representing evil is destroyed. The novel thus remains a

¹. Ibid., p. 38
lively "documentary on racial prejudices and its origin in colonialism."¹ and shows concerns with the forces responsible for shaping a woman's predicament wherever she happens to be.

¹ Margaret P. Joseph, Kamala Markandaya, p. 73.